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It must have been pretty terrifying.

Up there on that mountain.

First Jesus turns a dazzling white,

his face shone like the sun.

Then there was Moses and Elijah.

Not just heroes of the faith,

but ones long dead.

That was probably enough.

Probably enough to see your master's face shine like the sun;

probably enough to see the man

that God buried with his own hands

and the man that God carried off in the whirlwind:

two people who had loved God,

followed God,

and had stories told about them

for hundreds of years

...stories we are still telling today.

That was probably enough,

terrifying enough.

But that wasn't the end of it.

More than any of these things:
the heroes come back to life
or all the light of the world shining in the face of your friend,
more than any of that
was the voice of God;
the thunder cracking,
mountain crumbling,
world ending
-creation making voice of God.

“This is my Son,
the Beloved,
with him I am well pleased;
listen to him!”

When they heard this,
they fell to the ground
and were overcome by fear.

Yes.
Fear would be the least of it.
This moment,
this is either the end of everything,
or the beginning of everything.

And given the way that God tends to work,
...it was likely both all at once.

We call this story the Transfiguration.
We hear it every year on the last Sunday before Lent.

Wednesday we'll gather here
to make a smudgy mark on our foreheads
and remind ourselves of the dirt from which God made us,
the dirt that we'll all go back to.

What kind of life are we going to make in between?

We call this story the Transfiguration.
The figure of Jesus is transformed,
changed,
become something new.

It's not hard to imagine
how the disciples might have felt
that it was more than Jesus got changed
on top of that mountain.

How they might have come to the conclusion
that everything was changed.

I hope we would be something new after that:

after seeing the brightness of the sun
shining out of each other,
after an experience of the dead
come back to life,
after hearing the terrible voice of the Almighty
thunder down the words of love.

It must have been terrifying,
but they knew that the worst of it
was going to be back down the mountain.

Peter suggested that maybe
they could just stay up there.
Build some tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

“Let’s all stay up here.
It’s pretty weird on this mountain,
but I’m content to stay up here.

After all,
this is where we heard the voice of God;
this is where we saw God shining out of your face.
Let’s just not go back down
where things aren’t quite so clear.”

Peter knew what we may not remember.

Our reading starts out:

“Six days later...”.

Peter knew that six days before,

Jesus had been taking like this:

“If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves
and take up their cross
and follow me.

For those who want to save their life
will lose it,
and those who lose their life for my sake
will find it.

For what will it profit them
if they gain the whole world
but forfeit their life?”

It's no wonder then,
even with the terrifying events of the mountain top,
Peter would rather be up there
than coming back down the mountain.

Back down into a world
where you've got to give up your life to find it,
where you've got to take up a cross
if you want to follow Jesus.

There weren't any crosses up on that mountain,
just a shining light
and the voice of God.

Better to have a terrifying God
bringing you to your knees.
Better that
than being asked to get off our knees
and pick up a cross.

Church is one of those weird places.

It's a lot like that mountain top:

hopefully,

some scary stuff is happening to us in here.

Hopefully

we are seeing the light of God

shining through these windows

and out of the faces of those near to us.

Hopefully

we are hearing the voice of the Almighty

telling us about the love that claims our lives.

Hopefully

we get terrified in here

at least every now and then.

But most of us...

are tempted to keep our Jesus

shut behind those doors.

Maybe even behind that gate

up there behind me.

But there's a world out there.

A world full of crosses,

a world where we are asked to take risks

and to lose our lives

in order that we might find salvation.

They just did what made sense.
Mostly like us.

It makes good sense
to keep Jesus locked up inside this church.
We hear and see some things in this church
that might terrify us,
but that's better than all those crosses we have to bear
just outside those doors.

Jesus came and touched them and said,
"Get up,
do not be afraid."

We aren't any different.
He's saying the same thing to all of us,
"Get up,
do not be afraid."

But we are.
We are afraid.
Getting up
means picking up a cross.
Getting up
means putting down our life.

So I'll just do my best
to shut Jesus up inside this church.

I can listen to him in here,
but I tell you this,
I'll be locking the door
on my way out.

When is the last time
it did any good
to lock the door,
to shut Jesus up?

***Now what was it that happened,
the last time
we left Jesus for dead?***